

PR 7610

SONNY CRISS

Rockin' in Rhythm



EDDIE GREEN / BOB CRANSHAW / ALAN DAWSON

DESIGN / PHOTO: DON SCHLITTEN

Rockin' in Rhythm

SONNYY CRISS

PREVIEW COPY



PRESTIGE 7610

SONNYY CRISS, alto sax
EDDIE GREEN, piano
BOB CRANSHAW, bass
ALAN DAWSON, drums

Side A

1. ELEANOR RIGBY 5:32
2. WHEN THE SUN COMES OUT 6:31
3. SONNYMOON FOR TWO 4:50

Side B

1. ROCKIN' IN RHYTHM 4:37
2. MISTY ROSES 5:53
3. THE MASQUERADE IS OVER 5:47

The Sonny Criss story is pretty much in line with the story of jazz itself. The years of study and application to the craft of playing the music are followed by a period of discovery, activity and recognition; then the slump as younger, newer musicians come up, get discovered, and begin the process all over again. Yesterday's hero becomes the forgotten man of tomorrow.

Such is life in the now generation. In a sense the attitude is a parallel of the technological advance of the age. The revolutionary techniques developed by pioneers are taken for granted, while the rapid strides of the new breed of scientist are spread all over the front pages. The cat who sang *Out Of Sight, Out Of Mind* had things figured out. Criss is unique in that he has returned, and with such impact, that you may have been wondering where he has been.

In the late 1940's Sonny Criss was in sight. After High School graduation he gigged around Los Angeles with Howard McGhee, Al Killian and others until he joined Norman Granz' Jazz At The Philharmonic show in 1948. The years 1948-51 were good ones for Criss. He was heavily featured in the JATP programs and during the off months worked with Flip Phillips sextet (personnel drawn largely from JATP musicians). He recorded his first sides for Mercury in 1949 with a quartet consisting of himself, Hamp Hawes, Iggy Shevack and Chuck Thompson. The JATP period was especially interesting as Criss played alongside Charlie Parker. One might expect that any fellow alto player would be overwhelmed by Parker but Criss, in recalling the period, remarked, "It was stimulating and, for better or worse, I went at Bird every night." Criss never appeared on any of the JATP discs but he has stated that Granz undoubtedly has a good deal of unreleased material since tape was rolling on many of the shows.

Following the Granz period Sonny settled into The Lighthouse, one of the nation's most enduring night-

clubs. The club in Hermosa-Beach, California features name groups these days but for many years the regular attraction was The Lighthouse All-Stars fronted by the club's manager, bassist Howard Rumsey.

The Lighthouse All-Stars of 1950 had Criss, Teddy Edwards, Hamp Hawes and either Larry Bunker or Shelly Manne as its other members. The band was never recorded.

Following that Sonny went out with a Billy Eckstine concert package which toured the U.S. for a good part of 1951. Sonny enjoyed working with Eckstine and the all-star cast included Kenny Clarke, Tommy Potter, Lockjaw Davis, Benny Green, Joe Newman and Bobby Tucker, Mr. B's perennial accompanist.

The slump came in 1952 when West Coast jazz became the vogue. In speaking of this period Sonny sheds light on many mistaken assumptions held by fans and critics. When asked about what caused the situation where White jazz became dominate, Sonny replied:

"I only know it happened. The explanations usually given aren't true. I think there may have been some economic factors involved . . . But there was no question of bitterness between the Hollywood musicians and South Side players. We had been too close in the years prior. I think it was just that something happened economically within the structure of jazz . . . Those with the power were pushing a certain type of record—a brand of music that most of the dedicated Negro musicians didn't want to play and weren't being asked to play anyway."

The lean period lasted until 1955 when Sonny joined Buddy Rich. This association lasted for some five years and the group made some records for Norman Granz. Harry "Sweets" Edison was present during that period but once the group began touring Ola Hansen came in on trombone, Kenny Drew on piano and Phil Leshin was the bassist.

While with Buddy Rich, Sonny recorded three albums for Imperial. These excellent records were given no publicity and are collector's items today.

During the end of his time with Rich (1959), Criss recorded an album for the Peacock label and later recorded an LP and an EP in France during his stay in Europe (1962—early 1965). These have also become collector's items.

Since his return from Europe, Sonny has remained in Los Angeles with the exception of his trips to New York for recording. In his home town he has not been accorded much favor which is a tribute to the monstrous stupidity of that city's (and—let's face it—the entire nation's) clubowners. True there have been concerts here and there and occasional gigs but nothing steady enough to present his talent the way it deserves to be. Perhaps the coming year will be better.

This LP is Sonny Criss' sixth for Prestige. It is his fourth quartet LP, his fourth LP utilizing that fantastic talents of Alan Dawson and the third time that Bob Cran-

shaw has lent his considerable talent to the proceedings.

Eddie Green is a young Philadelphia pianist who has been heard on Prestige with Pat Martino on *East!* (PR 7562) and by the evidence demonstrated here is a man to reckon with. Dig his opener on *Rockin' In Rhythm*.

The music in the album consists of familiar tunes but, generally speaking, there has been a good deal of thought given them. Sonny is prone to consider material for some time before committing it to wax. *Eleanor Rigby* is an example. The Beatles' tune was scheduled to have been recorded in the *Up, Up & Away* (PR 7530) session but it was postponed until this session giving Criss extra time to think about the treatment. The power and intensity in this very personal rendition brings to mind the passion if not the method of John Coltrane. Intensity, passion and power are words that are tossed around indiscriminately but actual and definite usage applies here.

When The Sun Comes Out is one of those tunes which you have heard yet it is difficult to recall when or where. The song is actually a singer's vehicle and Sonny "sings" the Harold Arlen classic with incredible feeling.

Sonny Rollins' *Sonnymoon For Two* is an excellent vehicle for a charging Sonny Criss. It was one of the tunes he played at the 1968 Newport Jazz Festival where he received a standing ovation.

Rockin' In Rhythm is one of the first melodies that Sonny learned to play in his native Memphis. It is an Ellington fingerbuster and never has there been such a steaming version of the tune. Indeed, I have never heard of treatment of the song by a quartet. Generally it has been the sole property of the Ellington band.

Misty Roses is a Tim Hardin song that Sonny had been listening to for some time on the radio. Don Schlitten's daughter Tiana was the first to suggest Sonny recording the song and there is no question but Sonny's style fits it perfectly. It sounds so natural that were not one aware of the origins of the tune it would easily be mistaken for an original.

The Masquerade Is Over is one of those melodies that have been done nearly to death but Criss, like any great jazz player, is able to take the song and make it uniquely his own. It is this quality precisely that separates the men from the boys and Criss has it in abundance.

Years ago Jimmy Witherspoon used to interpolate verses into the old blues *Good Rockin' Tonight*. At one point in the early 50's 'Spoon used to use the verse:

All the cats will be there even ol' Sonny Criss
If you don't come down, you won't know what you miss.

Of course "rockin'" means something different today but to those who remember when the word was used to denote merely heavy infectious swinging the phrase is most apt—then AND now.

Notes: Bob Porter (Jan. 1969)
Recording: Richard Alderson
Produced by DON SCHLITTEN



ROCKIN' IN RHYTHM
SONNY CRISS

PRST 7610

SIDE 1

1. ELEANOR RIGBY
Lennon/McCartney-Maclen Music-BMI 5:32
2. WHEN THE SUN COMES OUT
Arlen/Koehler-Bregman Vocco & Conn.-ASCAP 6:31
3. SONNYMOON FOR TWO
Rollins-Son Rol Music-BMI 4:50

PRESTIGE RECORDS INC., 203 S. WASHINGTON AVE., BERGENFIELD, N. J.

AV 765



ROCKIN' IN RHYTHM
SONNY CRISS

PRST 7610

SIDE 2

1. ROCKIN IN RHYTHM
Ellington/Carney/Mills-Mills Music-ASCAP 4:37

2. MISTY ROSES
Hardin-Faithful Virtue Music-BMI 5:53

3. THE MASQUERADE IS OVER
Wrubel/Magidson-DeSylvia,
Brown & Henderson-ASCAP 5:47

PRESTIGE RECORDS INC., 203 S. WASHINGTON AVE., BERGENFIELD, N. J.